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SUBJECT: ZHEJIANG COURT BROADCASTS TRIAL ONLINE

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¶1. (SBU) In a move to increase transparency in its judicial
system, the Zhejiang High Court carried a simulcast of the
proceedings of a commercial dispute trial on its website on
April 12. According to Zhejiang High Court Foreign Affairs
Office Director Chen Zhongping, this was the first time a
provincial high court in China broadcast a live trial online.
Chen, the official in charge of the Zhejiang High Court
simulcast, said the purpose was to expand judicial transparency
and help ordinary people understand court procedures. The
project was initiated by Zhejiang High Court President Yin Yong,
who was appointed last year and has made increased transparency
a priority. Ying had made a formal commitment to broadcast
trials during a Zhejiang People's Congress meeting in February
¶2007.

¶2. (SBU) Chen added that the Zhejiang High Court planned to
broadcast select additional cases this year that had "wide
social influence" and in which there was public interest,
including criminal cases. Chen said it was unlikely that other
provincial high courts would follow Zhejiang's example and
broadcast trials. However, he had heard that there were some
lower-level courts in Beijing and Jinling that had broadcast
trials online in the past.

¶3. (SBU) Chen said the trial was not only broadcast on the
Zhejiang High Court's website (www.zjcourt.cn), but also on the
Zhejiang provincial government website
(<http://zjnews.zjol.com.cn>). He noted that, in the future, the
Zhejiang High Court would notify the public five days in advance
to encourage more people to view the trials. Zhejiang High
Court officials had actually informed FSN Rule of Law
Coordinator (ROLC) a week before the broadcast. The trial
itself took about two hours and was a typical breach of contract
case between two Chinese companies. Except for the defense
attorney appearing extremely nervous, the trial appeared to be

completely ordinary.

¶4. (SBU) Although Chen claimed that the broadcast was covered by the local press, the Consulate found only a few articles. Xinhua (China's official news agency) had a short article. The Zhejiang Provincial Government's website (<http://zjnews.zjol.com.cn/05zjnews/system/2007/04/13/008334999.shtml>) had a longer piece. The website article said approximately 5000 people watched the trial during the first hour in which it was broadcast. The article itself had been viewed by netizens 180,000 times. Comments posted to the article were overwhelmingly positive, with one netizen commenting that the simulcast was a "good step and development."

¶5. (SBU) Comment: The Zhejiang High Court has been active in the past year in initiating transparency projects and courting cooperation with the Consulate on rule of law issues. Zhejiang High Court officials recently hosted a U.S. voluntary speaker and have told Consulate ROLC of their interest in more dialogue and exchanges with U.S. legal experts. Consulate staff will continue to encourage the high court in its efforts and believe it could serve as a good partner for future rule of law projects in East China.

JARRETT